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COUNTY OF SANTA CLARA SOCIAL SERVICES AGENCY DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

TEAM DECISION MAKING MEETING PROTOCOL

A) INTRODUCTION

Purpose Of Team Decision-Making Meetings (TDM)

A TDM meeting is a facilitated process in which child welfare social workers, social work supervisors, parents, other family members, community members, and service providers gather so that assigned social workers can make informed decisions and join with other meeting participants in reaching consensus regarding plans for removal and unplanned placement changes.

When social workers are making initial removal decisions TDM meetings focus on the safety needs of children and discussions center on whether children can remain at home with their parents, or if removal is necessary to maintain child with relatives if at all possible.

When social workers are making decisions regarding possible placement disruptions of children who are already under the care and supervision of DFCS discussion points center on placement changes and permanency plans.

B) **Role Of The TDM Facilitator**

Designated senior social work staff that has been trained in the TDM process will facilitate the meetings. Facilitators, as a representative of DFCS will be responsible for:

- Directive vs. neutral role
- Supporting and representing the values and 'best practice' of DFCS;
- Managing the meetings and guiding the participants through the TDM process;
- Maintaining broad knowledge about the department's policies, procedures, and resources;
- Sharing knowledge in regards to policies, procedures, and resources with meeting participants.
- Modeling respect and building trust for all the meeting participants;
- Assisting all the participants in clear and honest communication;
- Developing consensus among the meeting participants; and
- Helping all the participants to focus on child safety, family strengths, and the development of plans that keep children safe.

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C) Role of the Social Worker and Social Work Supervisor

Families being referred for TDM meetings may be assigned a team of social workers and social worker supervisors to help such families successfully move through the child welfare system. All members of the social work team will work collaboratively during and following TDM meetings. All team members (or their representative) will be responsible for:

- Attending TDM meetings for all assigned families and be an active meeting participant;
- Supporting the values and 'best practices' of DFCS;
- Sharing knowledge about agency policies and resources that would benefit families;
- Modeling respect and building trust for all the meeting participants;
- Opening and honestly communicating during the meeting;
- Following up on activities and tasks that grow out of the TDM meeting

D) When To Hold A TDM

1. Once social workers assigned to Emergency Response and/or Dependency Intake have discussed a family's situation with their supervisor, workers are required to request TDM meetings if children have suffered child maltreatment and removal from his or her parents is considered.
2. In collaboration with Social Worker Supervisors, Social Workers assigned to Court Services units are required to request TDM meetings whenever children are at risk of a placement disruption whether or not placement is in a County Foster Home, a Foster Family Agency (FFA) Home, a Group Home, or a Residential Care Facility.

E) Who Participates In a TDM

The assigned facilitator, assigned social worker, and a social work supervisor must attend this inclusive process. Parents, other family members, caregivers, community members representing school, health/mental care agencies, faith-based organizations, fraternal organizations, and services providers who may or may not have an existing relationship with the child, parent, or other family members are also invited.

F) Where Are TDM Meetings Held

It is important that TDM meetings are held in environments that maximize the participation of family members and community support persons. Such facilities

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must be safe, quiet, and have adequate seating for all participants. Facilities must accommodate the special needs of persons with disabilities. Meetings may be held in previously identified meetings rooms on the first floor of either building at the West Julian Street campus as well as at the Gilroy Family Resource Center (FRC), Nuestra Casa FRC, Ujirani FRC, Asian Pacific FRC (including the Family Conference Institute), the Children's Shelter, and other community-based and faith-based facilities located throughout the County.

G) Security Of TDM Participants

While TDM meetings are strength-based and family-focused they are held at times when families are in crisis and assessment of child maltreatment and family violence may not have reached conclusion. Many of these meetings will be held for families receiving services for either Emergency Response or Dependency Intake units. At this point-in-time social workers and parents may have not yet developed trusting working relationships. Consequently, social workers in collaboration with social work supervisors will need to determine when meetings should be held in facilities where uniformed security personnel are available. Prior to the meeting social workers and facilitators will discuss any safety concerns (such as history of family violence, substance abuse, sexual abuse, and possible conflictual relationships). Maintaining safety for all participants will be addressed in the meeting guidelines. All meeting rooms must have access to a telephone. It is also important that exits and parking lots are well lit. Family members will be excluded from meetings if their participation violates protection or stay-away orders.

H) TDM PRE-MEETING PROCESS

Requesting a TDM – A TDM can be requested by any assigned social worker once the worker and his/her supervisor deems it appropriate by contacting the TDM clerical support staff. Contact with clerical staff may be by telephone or by faxing a referral form.

I) Types of TDM Meetings

PRIORITY 1

- **Emergency Removal** - Removal has occurred or there is strong possibility that removal is imminent for the child's own safety and protection. **TDM to occur within 24 hours – one day.**

PRIORITY 2

- **Placement Disruption** – The social worker or social work supervisor has been notified that the child's placement is at risk. Notification can be during an informal conversation or via a Seven Day Notice. **TDM to occur within 168 hours – five days.**

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PRIORITY 3

- **Permanency Plan** – there is strong likelihood that reunification, adoption, guardianship, or long-term foster care will be the recommendation at the next Court Review. **TDM to occur at least one month prior to the Court Review.**

J) **Scheduling a TDM**

All TDM meetings will be scheduled by the TDM clerical support staff according to the priority given to the type of TDM. The TDM clerical support staff will be responsible for:

- Scheduling the facility, date and time of the TDM meeting
- Assigning a facilitator
- Notifying facilitator and all meeting participants of the date and time (via telephone)
- Documenting the completed tasks on the TDM Activity Log
- Determining cultural sensitivity needs
- Data entry for self-evaluation purposes

K) **Family Demographics (database input)**

The TDM clerical support staff will be responsible for maintaining the TDM database that includes information about family demographics and meeting outcomes.

L) **Special Needs**

Reasonable accommodations that promote safety and encourage open and honest communication is a necessity of all TDM meetings to assure positive meeting interactions and to increase the possibility of good outcomes for children, families and the department. The lack of reasonable accommodations, may prevent meeting participation by important members of families' circle of support.

- **Child supervision** – Provided for parents or other primary caretakers whose participation in the meeting would be beneficial and child care/supervision is no otherwise available.
- **Transportation** - Provided for parents or other primary caretakers whose participation in the meeting would be beneficial and transportation is a barrier for attendance.
- **Adaptation** – Language interpreters, mental health advocates, family violence advocates, and recorders for sight impaired parents or other primary caretakers are necessary to facilitate successful meetings.

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M) **Clearances**

Securing clearances and other background information would be advantageous prior to TDM meetings if the social worker is considering relatives or extended kin as an option for out-of-home placement. Due to the short time frames involved, only a cursory background check will be possible prior to the TDM.

N) **Notices**

Notices will be verbal except for some rare occasions when the social worker, the TDM clerical support staff, the facilitator, or other DFCS staff goes to the invited participant's residence or place of business to leave written notices of the meeting.

O) **Facilitator Notification**

The TDM clerical support staff will notify the assigned facilitator about the date, time, and location of the TDM via telephone, fax, and/or email. The facilitator will confirm receipt of notification via telephone, fax, and/or email communication with the clerical support staff and/or the social worker. Prior to the meeting social worker may send materials to the facilitator for review.

P) **Facilitator Preparation**

The facilitator's pre-meeting preparation is very important. Appropriate pre-meeting planning increases the likelihood that the meeting will be successful and the outcomes will be positive. The facilitator is also responsible for:

- Arriving at the meeting location a few minutes prior to the scheduled meeting time to make sure the room is available and appropriately set up with adequate setting for all participants
- Assuring that all necessary supplies and materials are available for the meeting participants.

Q) **TDM MEETING PROCESS**

Introductions – All TDM meetings should begin with the facilitator introducing himself/herself to the participants by giving his/her name and describing his/her role

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related to the TDM process. After the facilitator has introduced himself/herself, the facilitator will ask each participant to introduce himself/herself and to describe their relationship to the focus child(ren) and family and the resource capacity or support function.

Guidelines – Guidelines for TDM meetings should be verbally stated during meetings so that all participants agree upon them. Guidelines help create a safe environment by stating the expected behaviors for the meetings and building agreement between the meeting participants. The agreements help all the participants to:

- Focus on the child and family of concern
- Build awareness about the timeframe for the meeting and the process
- Address confidentiality and mandated reporting requirements
- Develop respect and dignity for all meeting participants
- Have opportunities to speak and be heard – open and honest communication
- Receive support from the agency staff, the family system, and the community

Purpose Identification and Clarification – This is an opportunity for the social worker to lead the discussion by presenting information which identifies issues that place the child(ren) at risk and strengths that the meeting participants can build upon. In this phase, the facilitator's responsibilities include:

- Directing participants to talk to each other
- Encouraging 'straight talk'
- Summarizing important points
- Asking open-ended questions to clarify the discussion
- Remaining aware and sensitive to the non-verbal behavioral, body, and verbal clues
- Maintaining the group's focus on safety and protection of the child(ren)
- Assuring that the social worker and other departmental representatives have ample opportunity to present all issues of concern

Brainstorming – During this period of the meeting all the participants may offer possible solutions related to the issues of concern (safety and protection of the child(ren)). In this phase the facilitator is responsible for:

- Explaining what is meant by brainstorming
- Clarifying expressed ideas and thoughts
- Encouraging creativity
- Summarizing information
- Documenting the group's thinking

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Decision – This is the phase of the meeting where the facilitator guides the participants toward consensus. The facilitator is responsible for:

- Ensuring that all ideas have been considered
- Maintaining a positive tone while guiding the group towards consensus
- Explaining the agency's expectation of consensus and the consequences for not reaching consensus
- Records the group's decision on the TDM Activity Report

Safety Plan and Action Steps – Once the decision has been reached the facilitator will be responsible for:

- Clearly identifying and recording the necessary action steps
- Records the group's decision on the TDM Activity Report

The action steps must be:

- Time limited and measurable within a specified time
- Inclusive of the parents or guardian roles if they attended the meeting
- Clearly identify the social worker's roles and responsibilities
- All issues of concern
- Identify all statutory and agency policy requirements

Placement – If the decision is to move the child(ren) to out-of-home placement, the facilitator will open the discussion about placement options.

Recap and Closing – The facilitator reads back the decision and clearly states the safety plan and action steps identifying the responsible parties. The facilitator has all participants sign-off on the action plan and gives each participant a copy.

R) TDM POST-MEETING PROCESS

Data Entry - Following the meeting, the facilitator is responsible for the completion of the TDM Activity Report and recording the outcome data for self-evaluation purposes. The outcome data includes the following:

- Type of TDM
- Type of case (service category)
- Number of prior CPS referrals for the focus family
- Number of placement changes (for children that have experienced voluntary or court ordered placement related to this incident)
- Name and role of meeting participants (i.e. social worker, parent, community representative, school representative, health or mental health representative)

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- Outcome of the TDM
- Number of subsequent CPS referrals

Self-Evaluation – The TDM clerical support staff will be responsible for data entry following the facilitator's completion of the TDM Activity Report.

Administrative Review – If consensus was not reached during the meeting, the assigned social worker will make the decision for the plan. If any DFCS staff involved in the TDM is concerned about the final decision, an Administrative Review can be requested. No matter which agency staff person requests the Administrative Review, it is the facilitator's responsible to follow-up to assure that the review is scheduled. Family member or community partners may not appeal the decision.

The Administrative Review is attended by all the DFCS staff that attended the TDM along with the SSPM and any staff that the SSPM, Deputy Director, or Director assigns to the Administrative Review. The decision of the Administrative Review is the final decision and all agency staff must fully support the decision.